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# Foreign Affairs: From Moralizing to Militarizing

## Viewpoint

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If foreign leaders wonder whether the United States knows what it wants in the world, it's not difficult to understand why. From administration to administration, and often within the same administration, we continually bounce from one foreign policy stance to another, and from one emotional state to another, with little consciousness of our long-term national interests. In one phase, our Presidents are for detente and may be seen kissing Brezhnev or declaring that a "generation of peace" is at hand. In another phase, the Soviet Union is posing "the gravest threat to peace since World War II," detente is a banned word at the White House and we are said (by Richard Nixon, author of "generation of peace") to be in the midst of World War III, and losing.

Somehow, it's impossible for our politicians to develop a consistent policy toward the Soviets that expresses the obvious: We are adversary systems likely to be in a state of sustained military, political, economic and ideological competition, but we have a common interest in not blowing up the world we live on and are struggling over. Hence, the U.S. needs to talk to the Soviets, lessen the competition where we can and reduce the threat of war. At the same time, however, we have to maintain

the arms, the intelligence assets and the political and economic strength to meet the competition.

A parallel inconsistency in our policy toward the Soviets governs American attitudes on human rights. In one phase, we are Wilsonians, out to convert the world to democracy. In another phase, we are hard-line realists, ready to be friends with our friends, even if they torture their own people. We are obviously in this second phase right now, Secretary of State Haig having declared that combating international terrorism (from the left, he meant) has replaced human rights as the chief preoccupation of the American government.

The shift is apparent in many places, but especially in Latin America. Everywhere that Jimmy Carter moralized, the Reagan administration wants to militarize. Argentina's military government is responsible for between 3,000 and 20,000 "disappearances" that are almost certainly murders. It is viciously anti-Semitic. It sells wheat to the Soviet Union and refused to condemn the invasion of Afghanistan. It has made a botch of its economy and may go to war with neighboring Chile. Yet the Reagan administration urged the lifting of restrictions on (unnecessary) U.S. military aid to Argentina.

Chile, meanwhile, is responsible for the best-documented foreign terrorist attack within the United States in recent history—the Washington car-bomb murder of Marxist former Ambassador Orlando Letelier—

and yet the Reagan administration has lifted export-import restrictions against it and has let its navy back into allied maneuvers. The U.S. may well restore military aid to Chile before long, especially if a threat from Argentina develops.

And in Central America, the administration seems to be seriously considering restoration of military aid to Guatemala even though that government (according to Amnesty International) has had 3,000 people killed within the last year, including 76 top leaders of the moderate Christian Democratic party. Meanwhile, neighboring Costa Rica, a traditional democracy, is in a fiscal and political crisis, but the Reagan administration opposed Congress's move to grant balance-of-payments assistance. It seems, it's only when a country reaches a state of massive insurgency, as in El Salvador, that U.S. economic aid is justified.

The appointment of Ernest Lefever as the State Department's human rights chief is the crowning statement of administration priorities. He may say now, to a Senate committee considering his nomination,

that he believes in even-handed application of human rights laws and in active, if "quiet" intervention with friendly authoritarian governments that are guilty of human rights depredations. But the whole world knows that Mr. Lefever previously said—and was appointed after saying—that there was little the U.S. "can or should do" to advance human rights and that he favored repeal of existing human rights laws.

One does not have to be a moralist to be offended by administration policy. One can be a pragmatist as well. The Lefever appointment and the indiscriminate militarization of Latin America policy amount in the political sphere to something this administration abhors in the military sphere—unilateral disarmament. The American reputation as a defender of human rights was a useful, hard-earned asset for the United States, but the Reagan administration is in the process of throwing it away.

There is no question that the United States needs a strong anti-terrorism policy, but we don't have to dispense with our human rights policy at the same time. In fact, they ought to be two parts of the same policy, and we should add to them an economic dimension, a revived Alliance for Progress. Most of all, we should stick with our policies from one administration to the next, so that it's clear to the world how we intend to defend our system and compete with the Soviets: with weapons, where necessary; but also by advancing justice, prosperity and human freedom.